THE STORY OF OVO

Peter Gabriel

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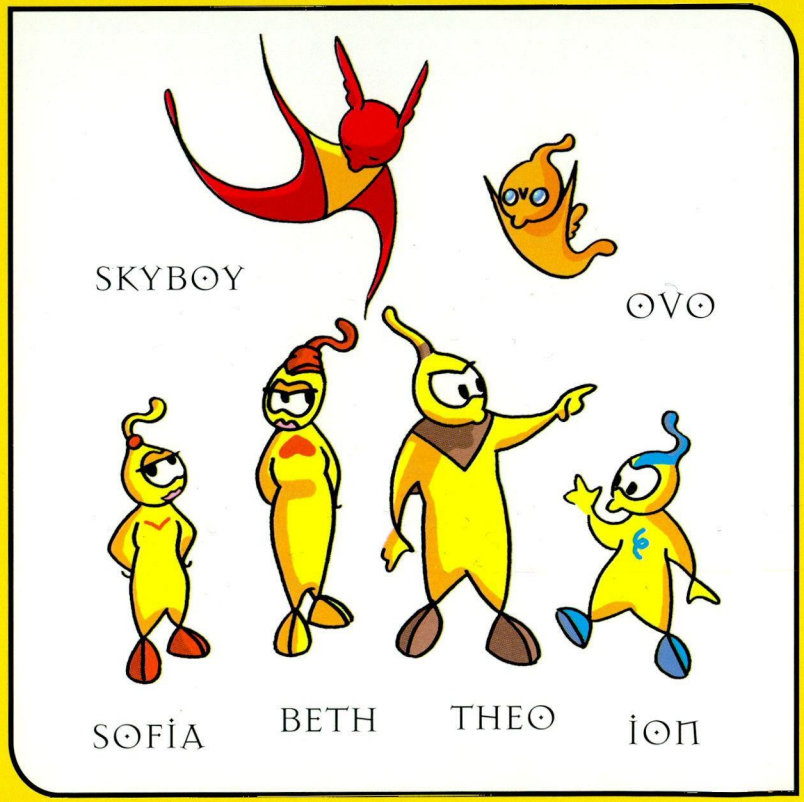
SKYBOY
OVO
SOFIA
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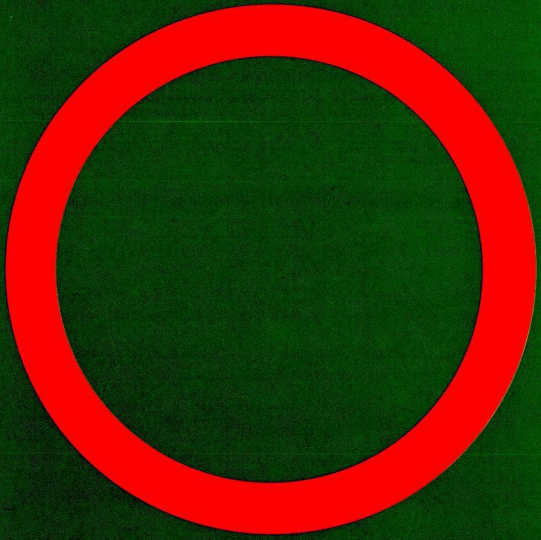
THEO
ION

ACT I

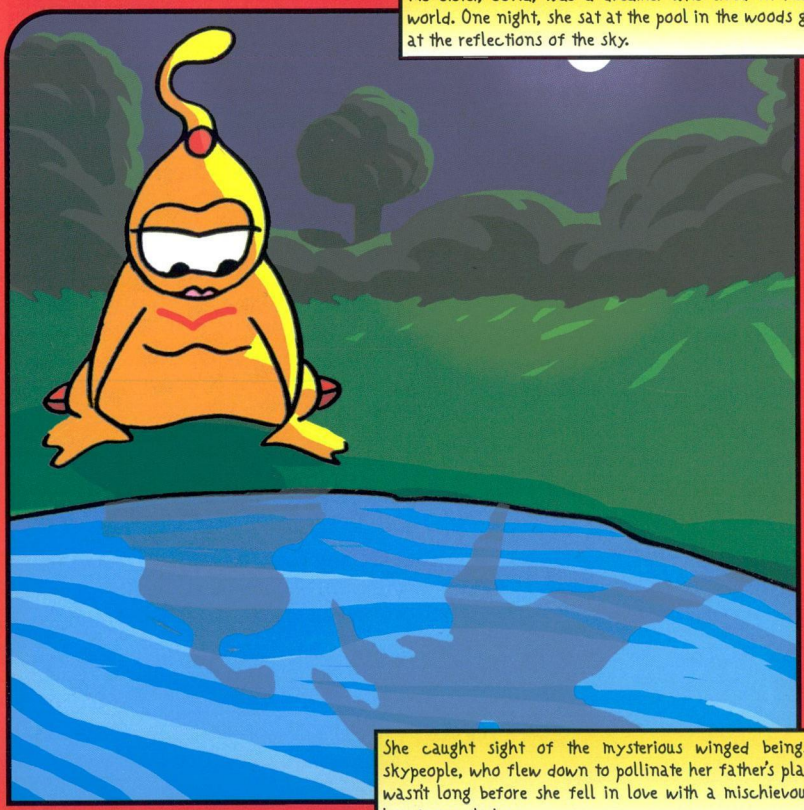


THE MAN WHO LOVED THE EARTH

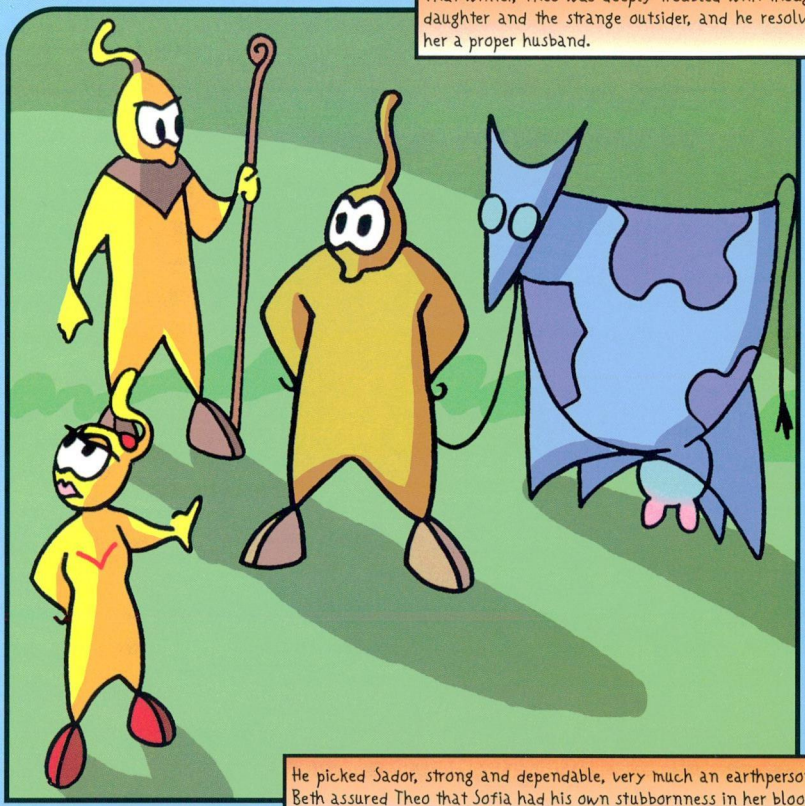
Long ago, on the misty island of Albion, lived a man named Theo who loved the earth.
His fields were full of the finest crops and flowers, for Theo knew well how to look after the land.

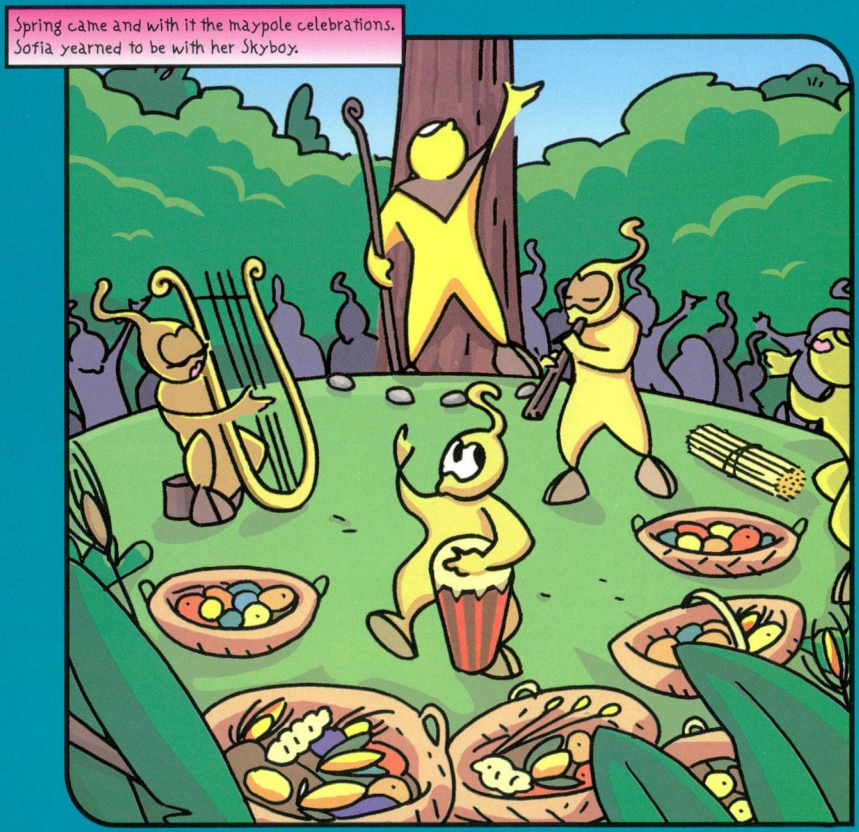
The oak trees that grew in the middle of the wood had provided the timber to build their home. Theo always kept an acorn in the centre of the house to remind them all from where the house had come.
His wife, Beth, was strong and intuitive. She was a woman with an unusual gift, for when she sat down to weave, images of things to come would pass through her head as the thread passed through her fingers.

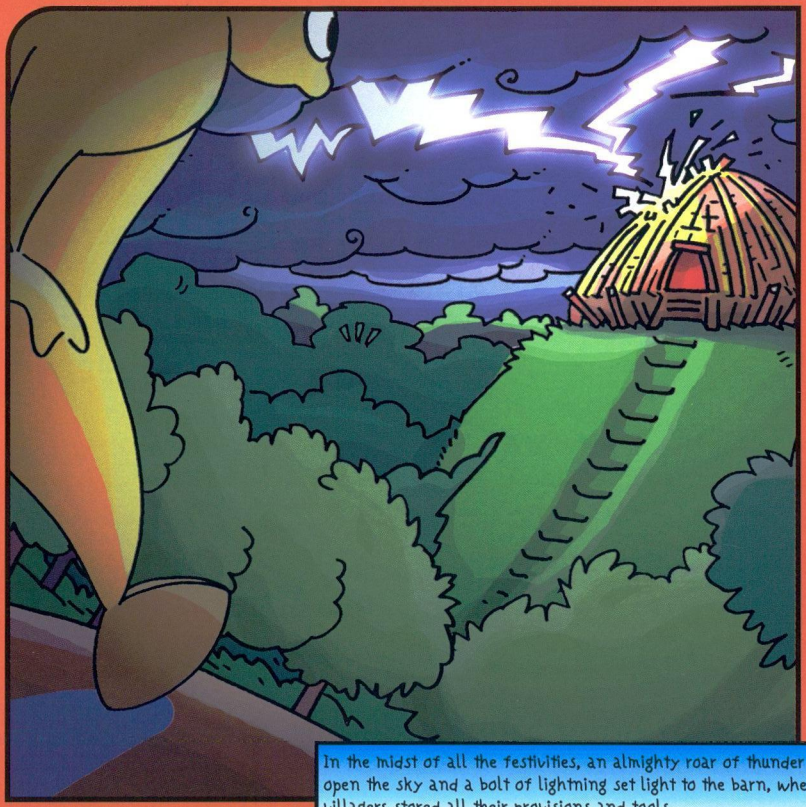
Their son, Ion, longed for his father's respect and spent his time devising clever inventions to improve the world.

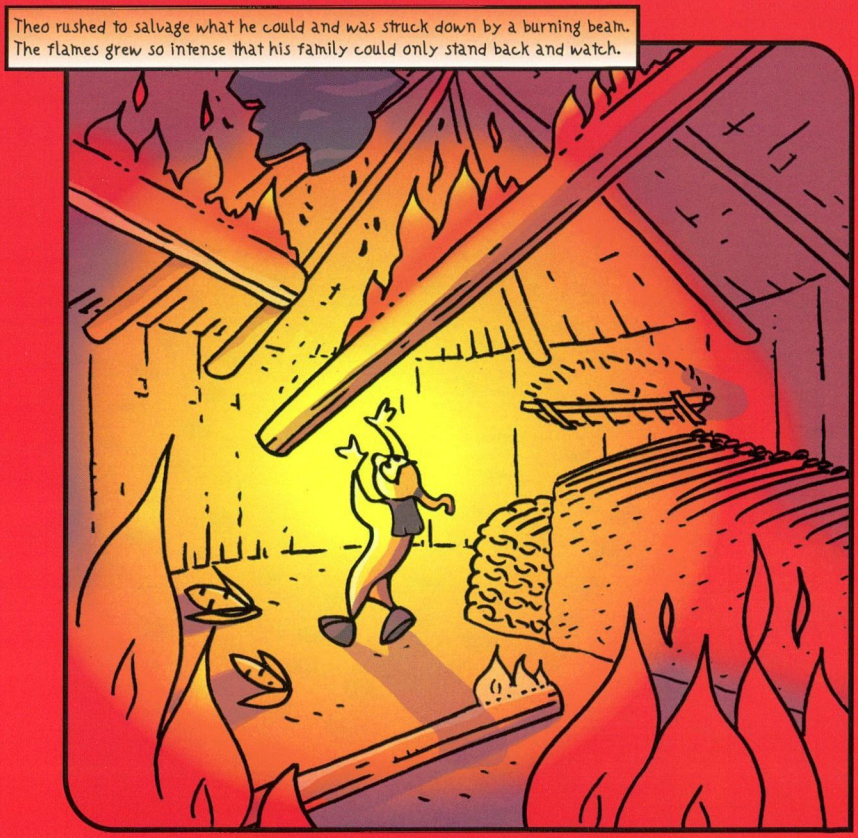

His sister, Sofia, was a dreamer who lived in her own world. One night, she sat at the pool in the woods gazing at the reflections of the sky.
She caught sight of the mysterious winged beings, the skypeople, who flew down to pollinate her father's plants. It wasn't long before she fell in love with a mischievous and handsome skyboy.

Theo, anxious about Sofia's disappearances, followed her into the woods. He was horrified to discover her with a strange looking young man.
He took up a stick, attacking first the skyboy and then his companions, scaring them all away.

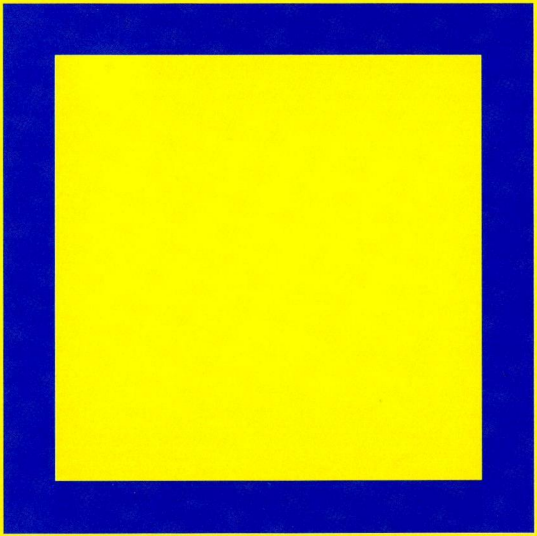

That winter, Theo was deeply troubled with thoughts of his daughter and the strange outsider, and he resolved to find her a proper husband.
He picked Sador, strong and dependable, very much an earthperson. But Beth assured Theo that Sofia had his own stubbornness in her blood. She knew her daughter would do exactly as she chose.


Spring came and with it the maypole celebrations.
Sofia yearned to be with her Skyboy.


In the midst of all the festivities, an almighty roar of thunder broke open the sky and a bolt of lightning set light to the barn, where the villagers stored all their provisions and tools.

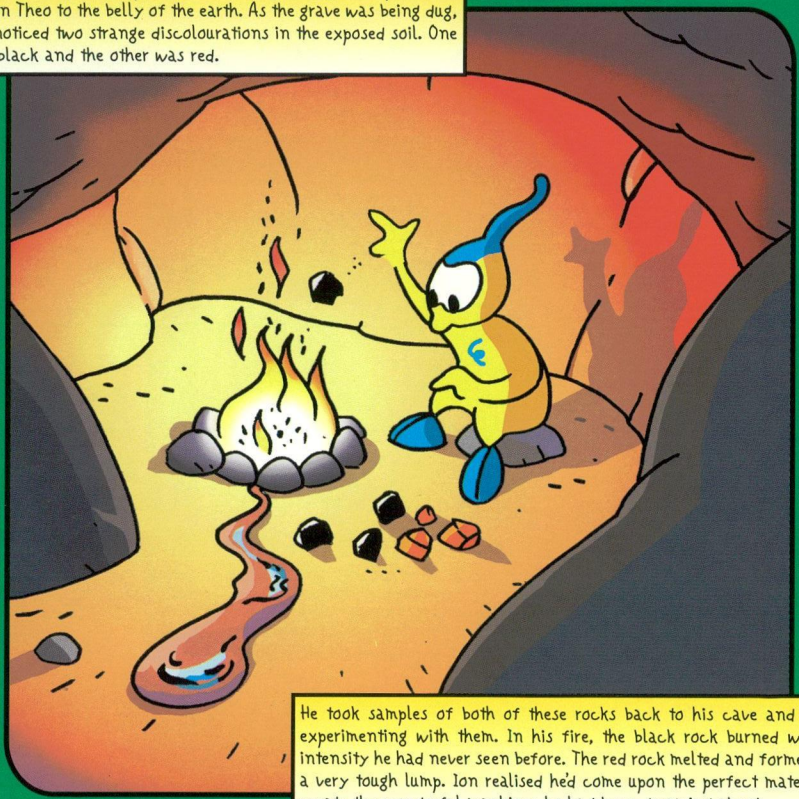

Theo rushed to salvage what he could and was struck down by a burning beam.
The flames grew so intense that his family could only stand back and watch.

ACT II

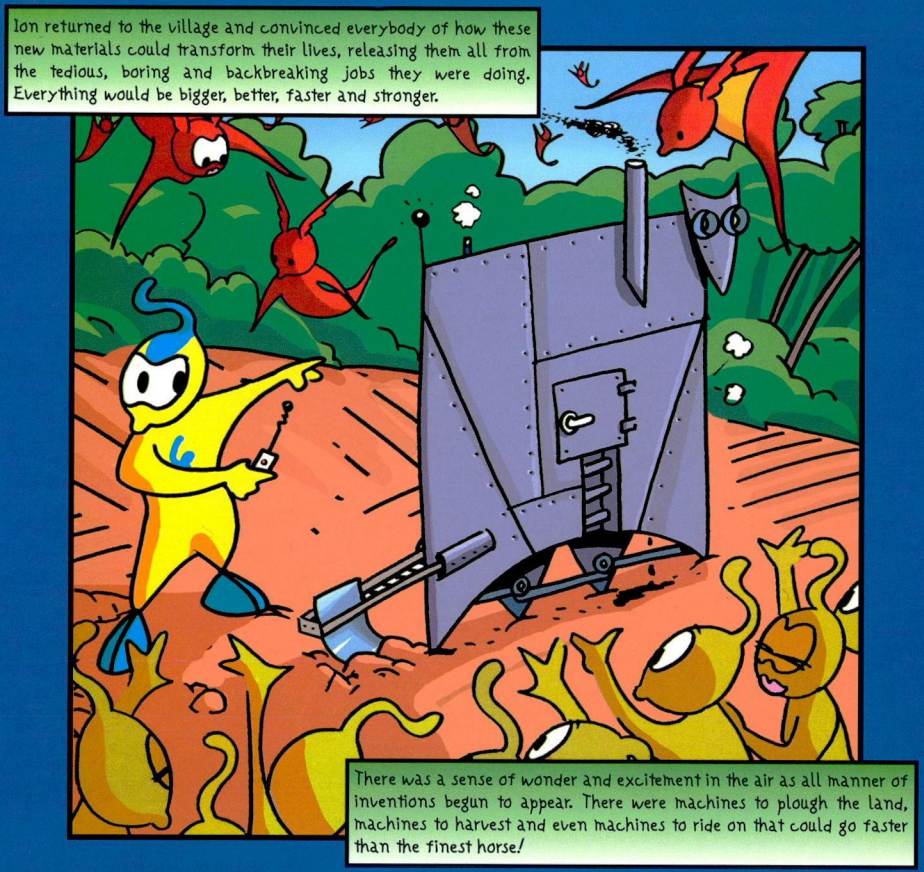


THE TOWER THAT ATE PEOPLE

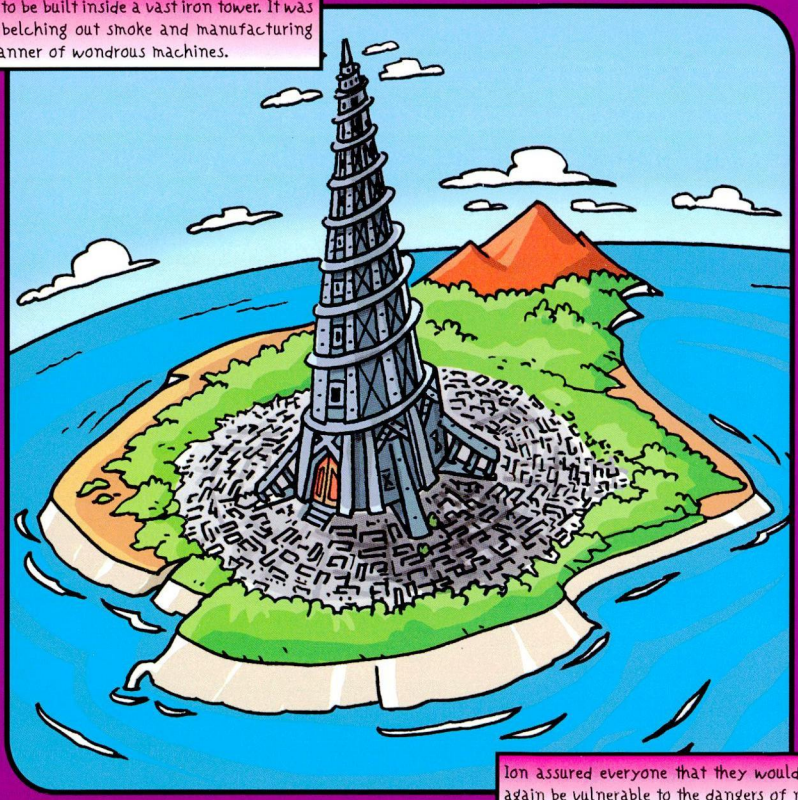
There was a great emptiness. The villagers dug a deep hole to return Theo to the belly of the earth. As the grave was being dug, Ion noticed two strange discolourations in the exposed soil. One was black and the other was red.



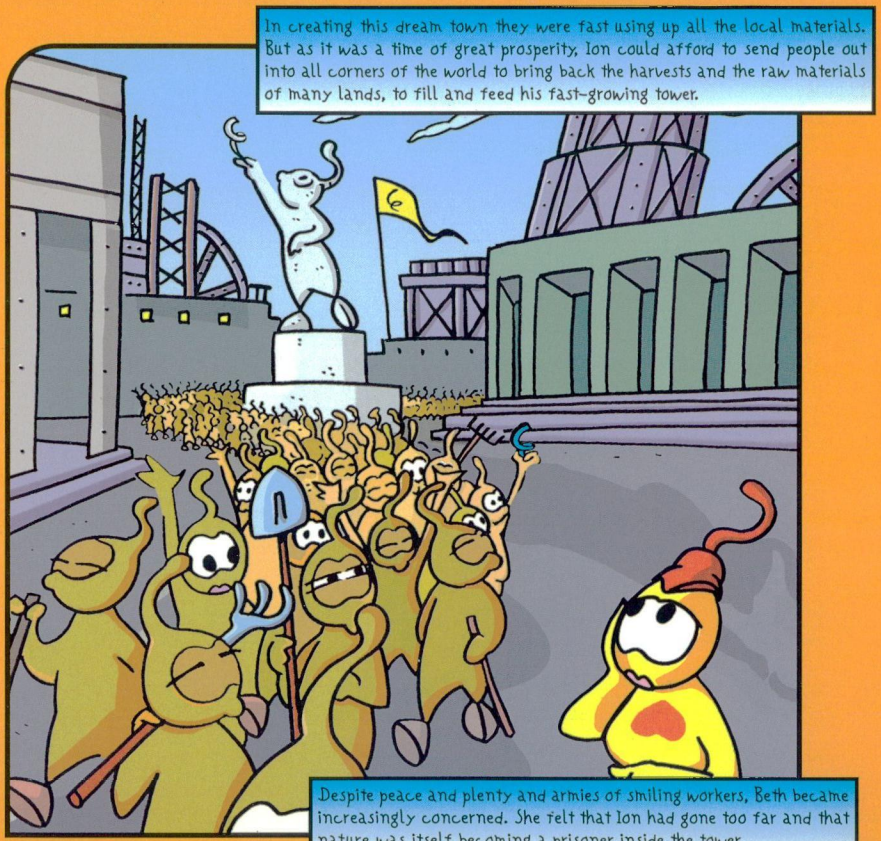
He took samples of both of these rocks back to his cave and began experimenting with them. In his fire, the black rock burned with an intensity he had never seen before. The red rock melted and formed into a very tough lump. Ion realised he'd come upon the perfect material to create the wonderful machines he had been dreaming about.

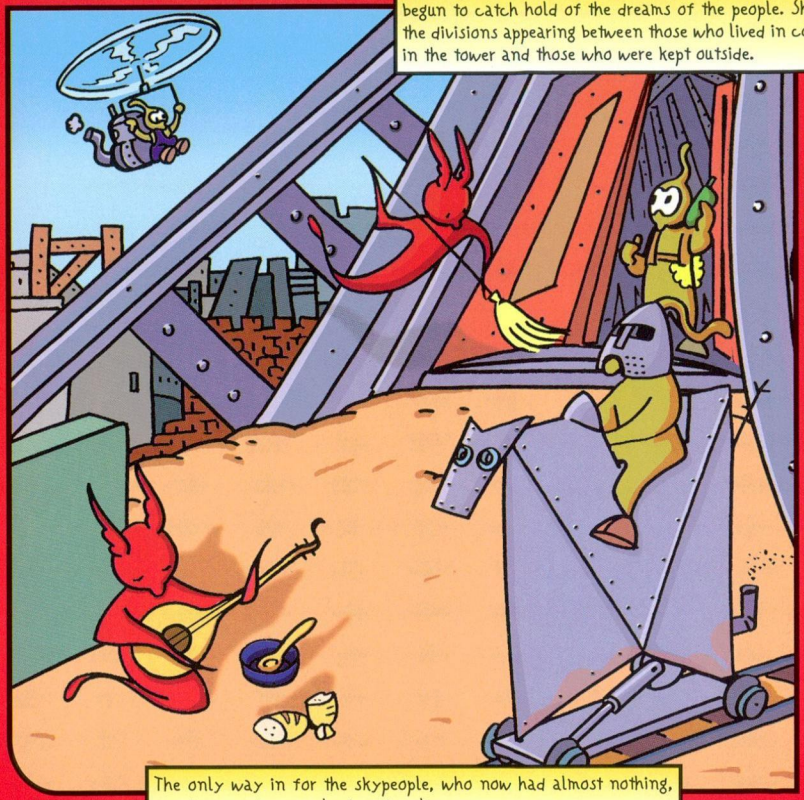

Ion returned to the village and convinced everybody of how these new materials could transform their lives, releasing them all from the tedious, boring and backbreaking jobs they were doing. Everything would be bigger, better, faster and stronger.
There was a sense of wonder and excitement in the air as all manner of inventions begun to appear. There were machines to plough the land, machines to harvest and even machines to ride on that could go faster than the finest horse!

He convinced all the people to help create a town to be built inside a vast iron tower. It was soon belching out smoke and manufacturing all manner of wondrous machines.

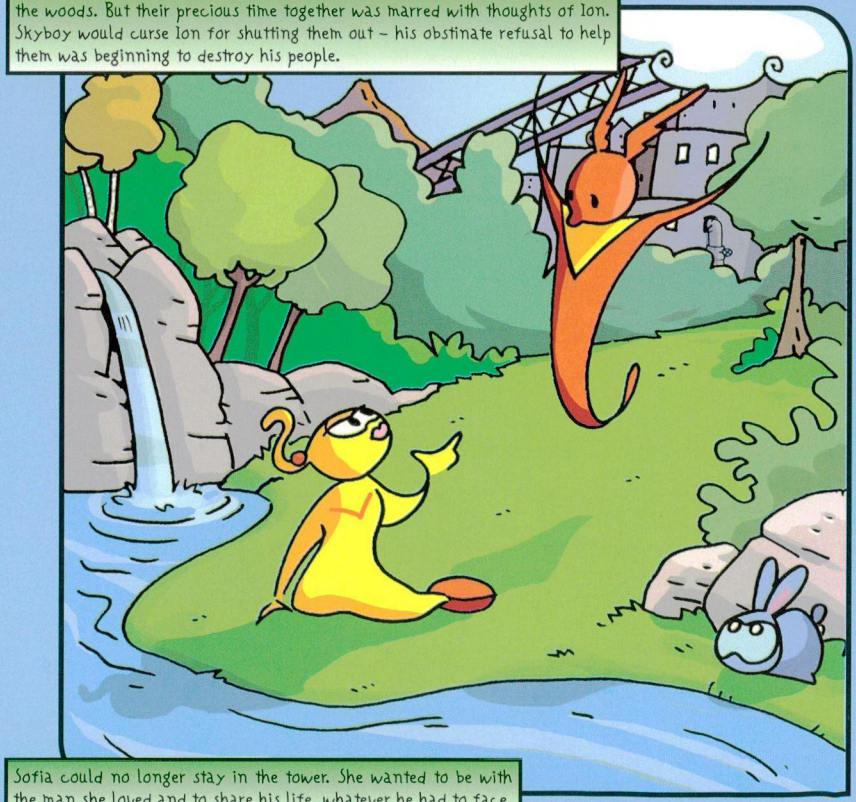


Ion assured everyone that they would never again be vulnerable to the dangers of nature.


In creating this dream town they were fast using up all the local materials. But as it was a time of great prosperity, Ion could afford to send people out into all corners of the world to bring back the harvests and the raw materials of many lands, to fill and feed his fast-growing tower.
Despite peace and plenty and armies of smiling workers, Beth became increasingly concerned. She felt that Ion had gone too far and that nature was itself becoming a prisoner inside the tower.


Beth began to notice that Ion's single minded ambition had begun to catch hold of the dreams of the people. She saw the divisions appearing between those who lived in comfort in the tower and those who were kept outside.
The only way in for the skypeople, who now had almost nothing, was to accept – or volunteer for slavery.

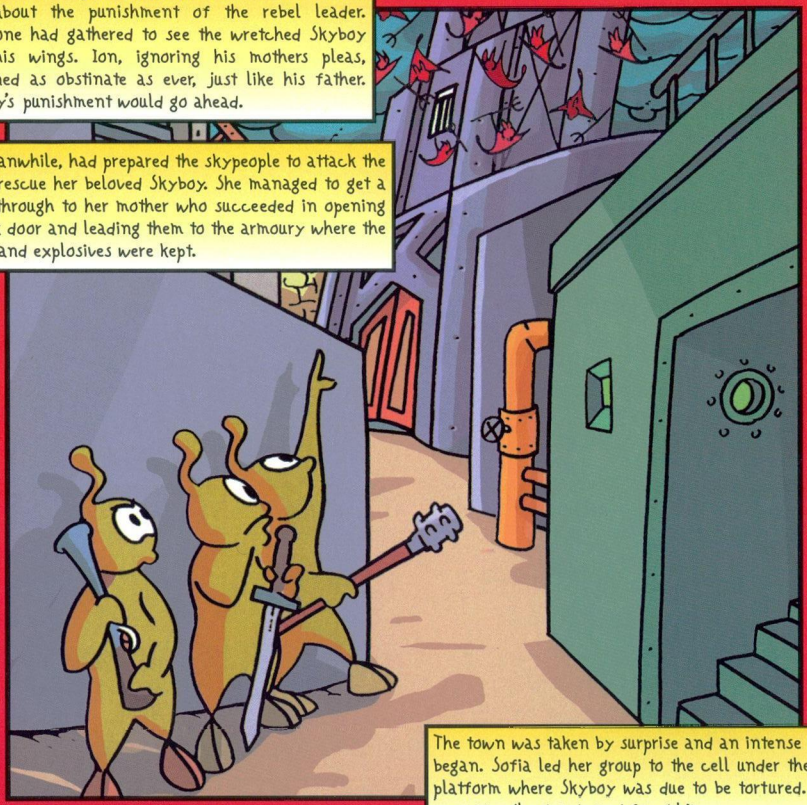
The sun grew harsh and the skypeople began to weaken and starve – so much so, that they could no longer fly, but Ion would not relent. All they could do was watch as the tired and dry land, once Theo's lush meadows, turned to dusty wasteland.


True as ever, Sofia continued to see her beloved Skyboy in what remained of the woods. But their precious time together was marred with thoughts of Ion. Skyboy would curse Ion for shutting them out – his obstinate refusal to help them was beginning to destroy his people.
Sofia could no longer stay in the tower. She wanted to be with the man she loved and to share his life, whatever he had to face.

All this time Ion was growing fearful. He was certain that it was the treacherous skypeople who had whipped up the storm that had killed his father.
He instructed his inventors to focus their attention on creating weapons of all descriptions. He was certain that if his earthpeople could see the threat of an enemy, that they would turn to him and unite behind him.

A long line of tired, hungry skypeople arrived at the gates, their faces pale and their wings limp and dusty. Leading this demoralised group, Ion saw the figure of Skyboy. It suddenly occurred to him that here was his real enemy, someone for his people to hate. He would surely win back public confidence by trapping this enemy leader, Skyboy.

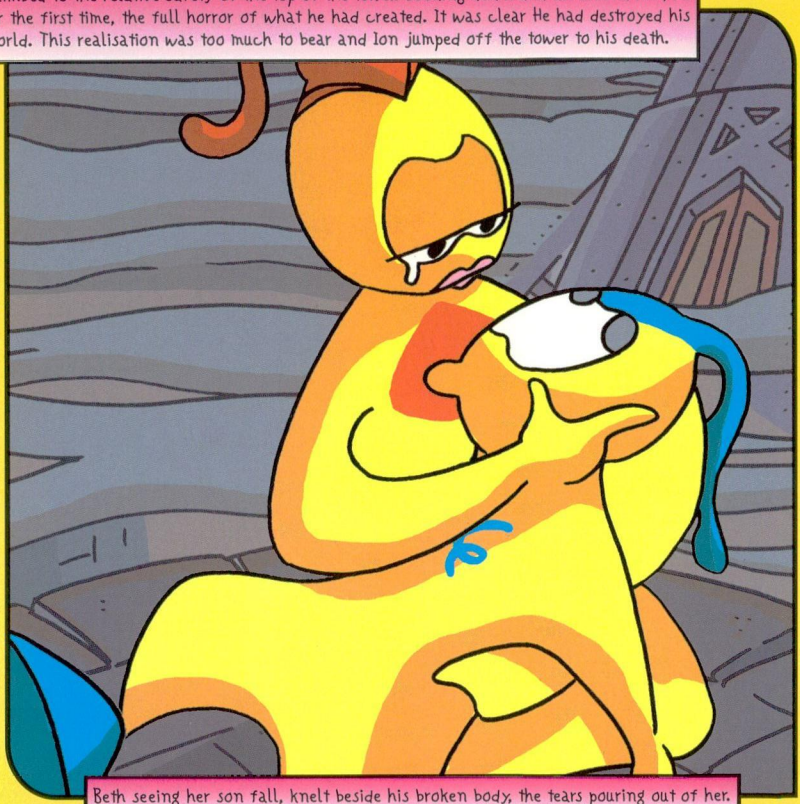
Ion surprised the bedraggled skypeople with his willingness to negotiate, but he was only willing to deal with Skyboy. However, as soon as he had entered the tower, Ion ordered his guards to lock the gates, grab Skyboy and take him down to the prison cells. He accused him of killing Theo, destroying the crops and leading a rebellion.

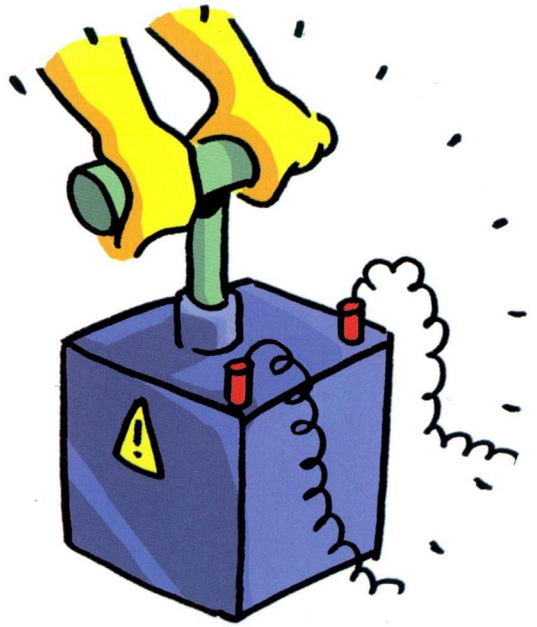


The next morning, the only conversation in the town was about the punishment of the rebel leader. Everyone had gathered to see the wretched Skyboy lose his wings. Ion, ignoring his mothers pleas, remained as obstinate as ever, just like his father. Skyboy's punishment would go ahead.

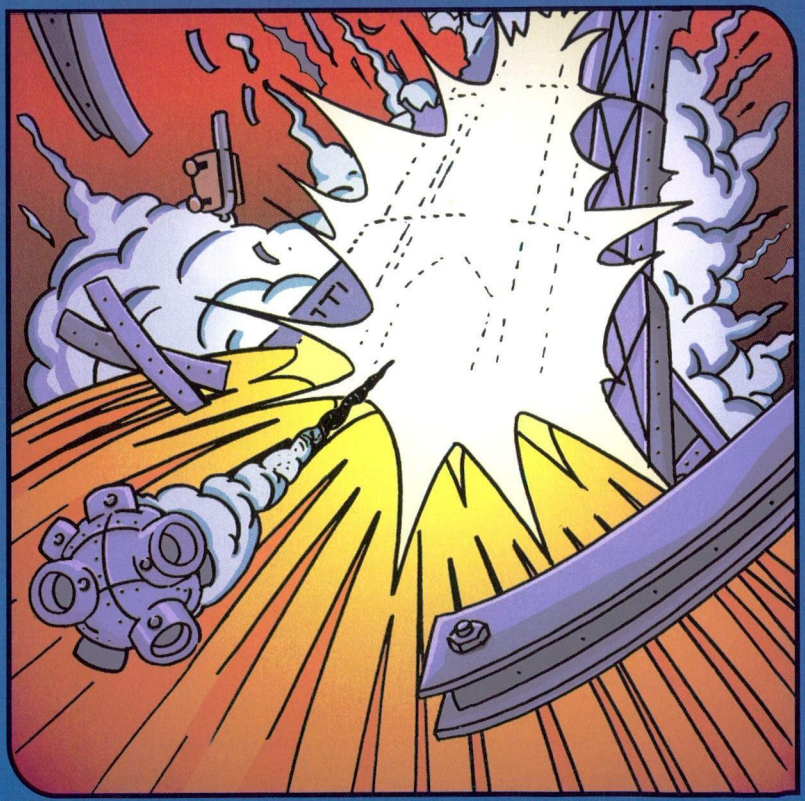
Sofia, meanwhile, had prepared the skypeople to attack the tower to rescue her beloved Skyboy. She managed to get a message through to her mother who succeeded in opening up a back door and leading them to the armoury where the weapons and explosives were kept.

The town was taken by surprise and an intense battle began. Sofia led her group to the cell under the very platform where Skyboy was due to be tortured. They overcame the guards and freed him.

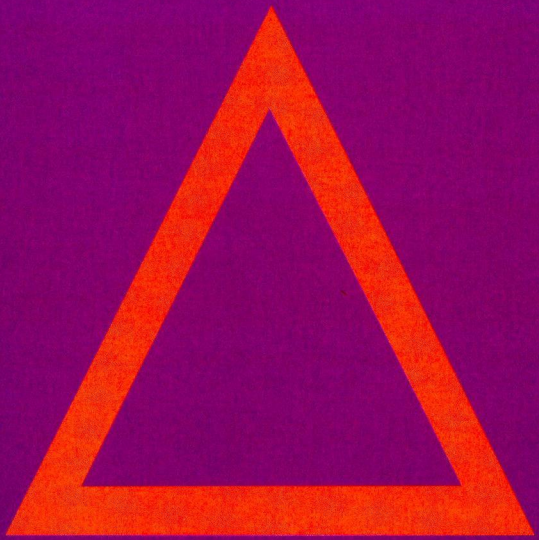

Ion had climbed to the relative safety of the top of the tower. Looking down and all around him, he sensed for the first time, the full horror of what he had created. It was clear He had destroyed his father's world. This realisation was too much to bear and Ion jumped off the tower to his death.
Beth seeing her son fall, knelt beside his broken body, the tears pouring out of her.



The skypeople were determined to destroy the evil tower and with the explosives from the armoury they brought the tower crashing to the ground. There were many deaths as the metal structure fell.

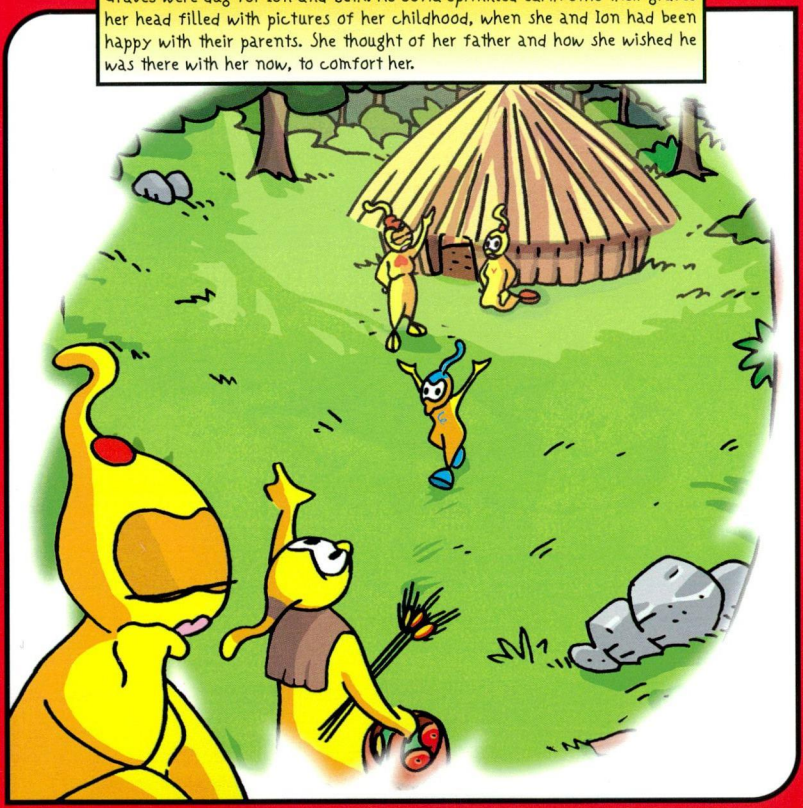


ACT III



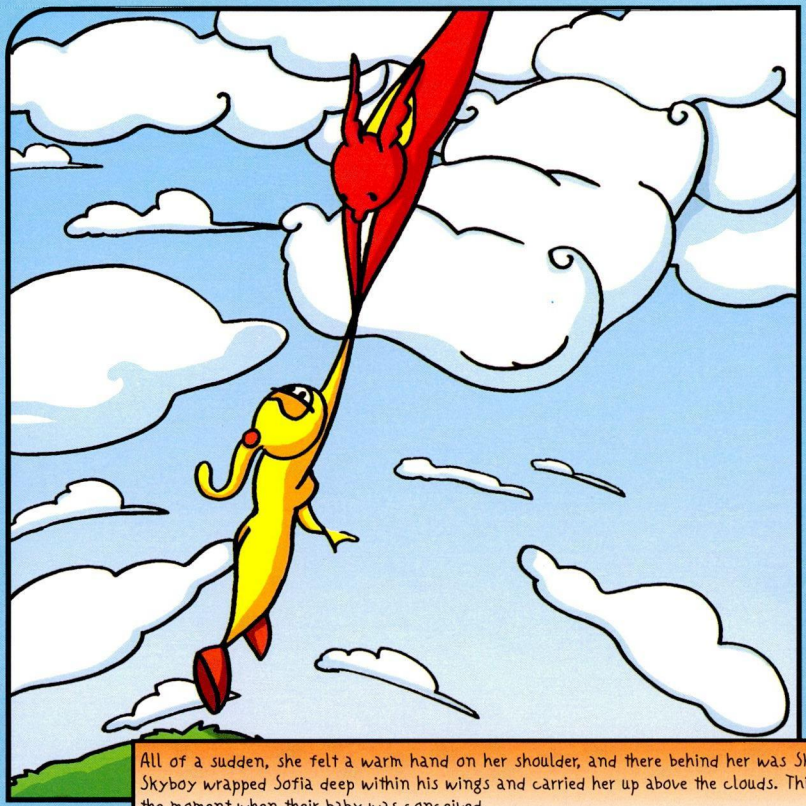
THE NEST THAT SAILED THE SKY

In the eerie silence that followed, Sofia discovered that her mother too had perished in the wreckage.
Sofia was distraught, not only had she lost all her family but there was no sign of Skyboy. She looked everywhere for him in the smouldering ruins. With a heavy heart, she moved back to where the people were burying their dead.


Graves were dug for Ion and Beth. As Sofia sprinkled earth onto their graves her head filled with pictures of her childhood, when she and Ion had been happy with their parents. She thought of her father and how she wished he was there with her now, to comfort her.

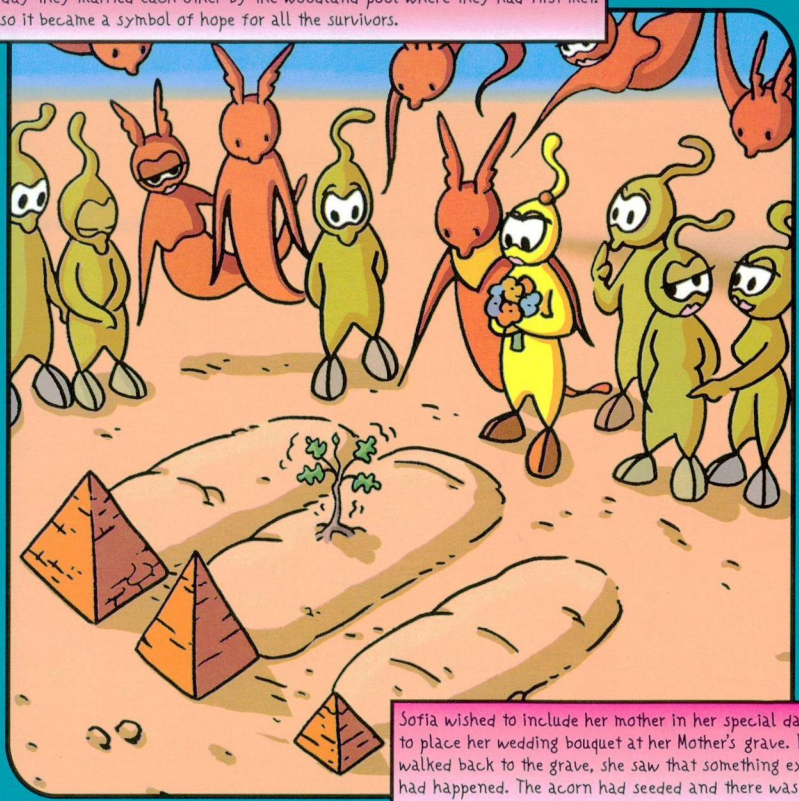
Whenever she was upset, she would feel in her pocket for the acorn, which she had rescued from her father's old house. It occurred to her that she should now plant the acorn beside her mother's body, so she pushed it into the soil and felt the loss of all her family.

Sofia needed to be alone. She started to weep, as she had never wept before.

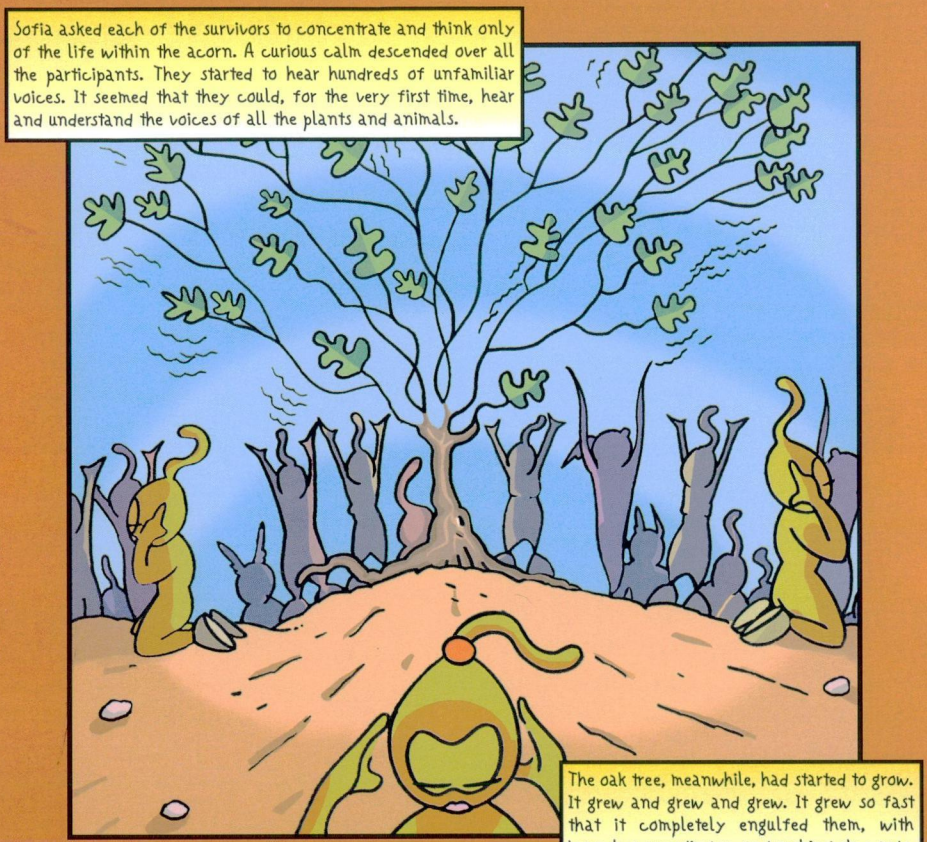


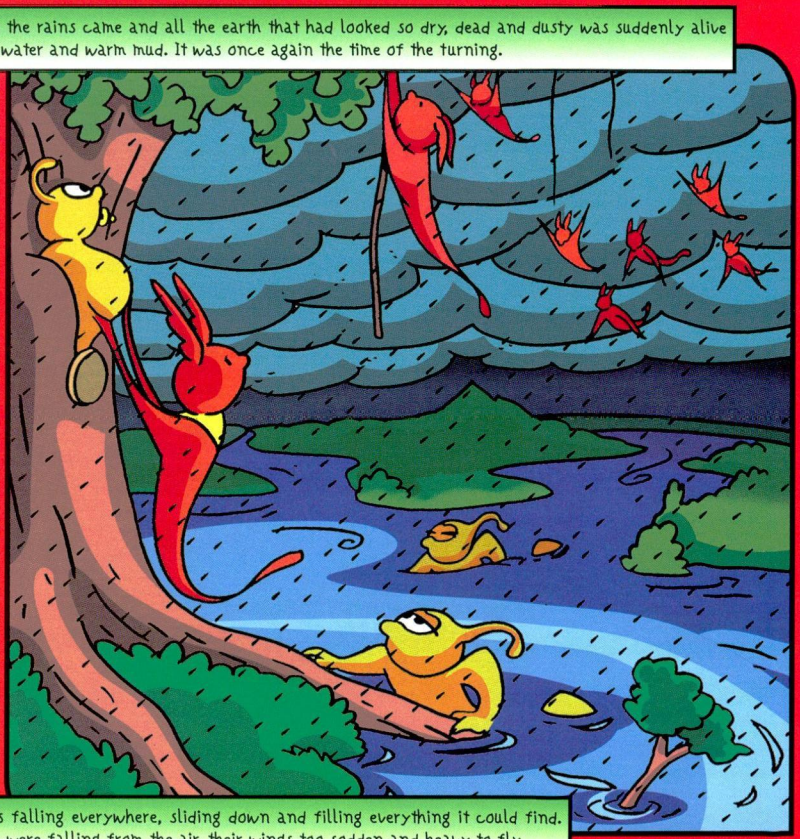
All of a sudden, she felt a warm hand on her shoulder, and there behind her was Skyboy. Skyboy wrapped Sofia deep within his wings and carried her up above the clouds. This was the moment when their baby was conceived.

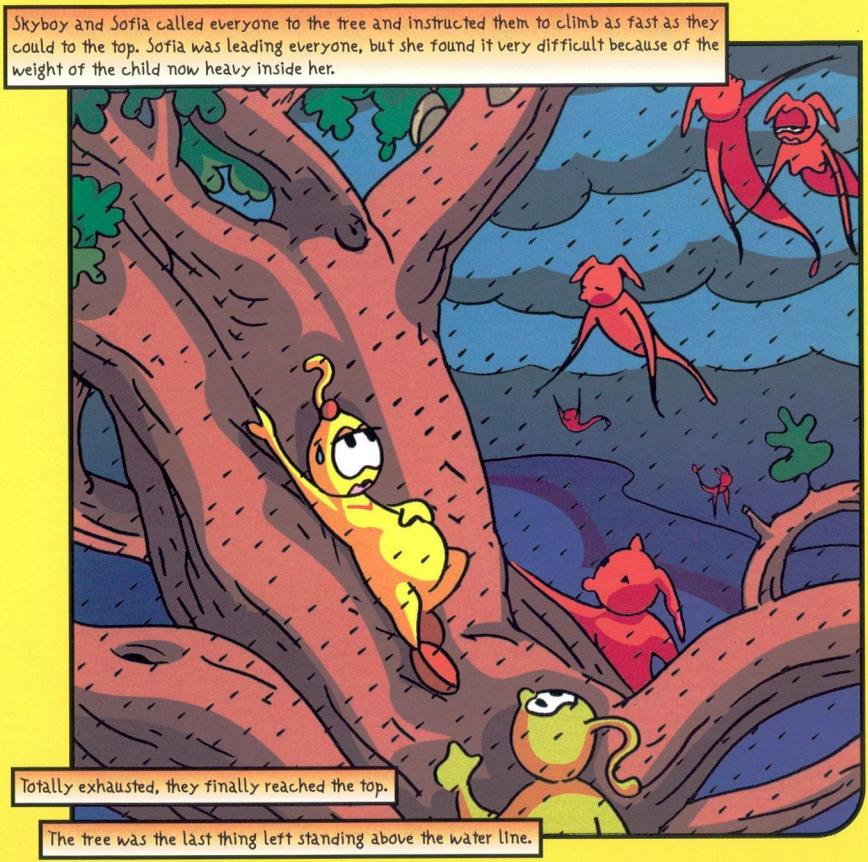
Next day they married each other by the woodland pool where they had first met. And so it became a symbol of hope for all the survivors.



Sofia wished to include her mother in her special day. She went to place her wedding bouquet at her Mother's grave. But as Sofia walked back to the grave, she saw that something extraordinary had happened. The acorn had seeded and there was a little oak tree growing from the grave.


Sofia asked each of the survivors to concentrate and think only of the life within the acorn. A curious calm descended over all the participants. They started to hear hundreds of unfamiliar voices. It seemed that they could, for the very first time, hear and understand the voices of all the plants and animals.
The oak tree, meanwhile, had started to grow. It grew and grew and grew. It grew so fast that it completely engulfed them, with branches sprouting up and rushing skywards.


Then the rains came and all the earth that had looked so dry, dead and dusty was suddenly alive with water and warm mud. It was once again the time of the turning.
Water was falling everywhere, sliding down and filling everything it could find. Skypeople were falling from the air, their wings too sodden and heavy to fly.


Skyboy and Sofia called everyone to the tree and instructed them to climb as fast as they could to the top. Sofia was leading everyone, but she found it very difficult because of the weight of the child now heavy inside her.
Totally exhausted, they finally reached the top.
The tree was the last thing left standing above the water line.

They broke off some branches to build a makeshift shelter and lay down to rest. Soon they had all fallen into a deep sleep.
Skyboy was awoken by a fierce shaking. It was Sofia, and she was breathing hard. Surrounded by well wishers their baby emerged onto a bed of leaves.

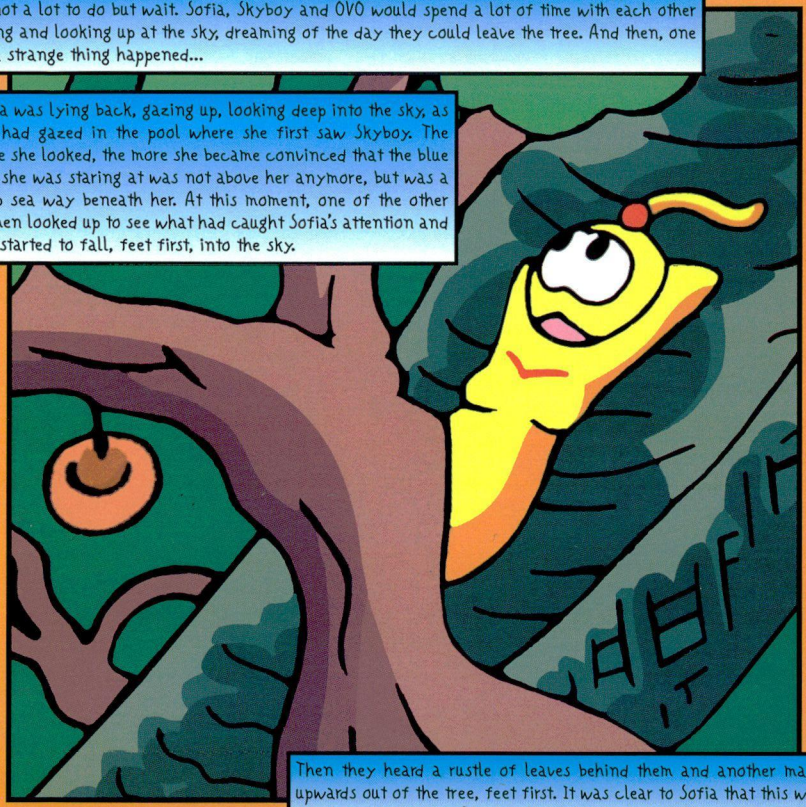
Skyboy's heavy eyelids were half closed as he looked to the eyes of his son for a name. And there it was, staring back at him. Two eyes and eyebrows – two 'O's with a 'V' between – and that is how OVO got his name.

They all slept a deep sleep that night and OVO woke Sofia up, demanding to be fed. Skyboy meanwhile, went off to see if it was safe to begin the long climb down. He returned despondent, because the water was as high as before.

On the next day they went off amongst the branches to look for anything that they could eat. To their amazement they found an incredible selection of fruits and nuts growing on an extraordinary and magical tree, all being fed by its sap.

The floodwater did not subside for many months, even though the rain eventually stopped. There was not a lot to do but wait. Sofia, Skyboy and OVO would spend a lot of time with each other playing and looking up at the sky, dreaming of the day they could leave the tree. And then, one day, a strange thing happened...

Sofia was lying back, gazing up, looking deep into the sky, as she had gazed in the pool where she first saw Skyboy. The more she looked, the more she became convinced that the blue sky she was staring at was not above her anymore, but was a deep sea way beneath her. At this moment, one of the other women looked up to see what had caught Sofia's attention and she started to fall, feet first, into the sky.



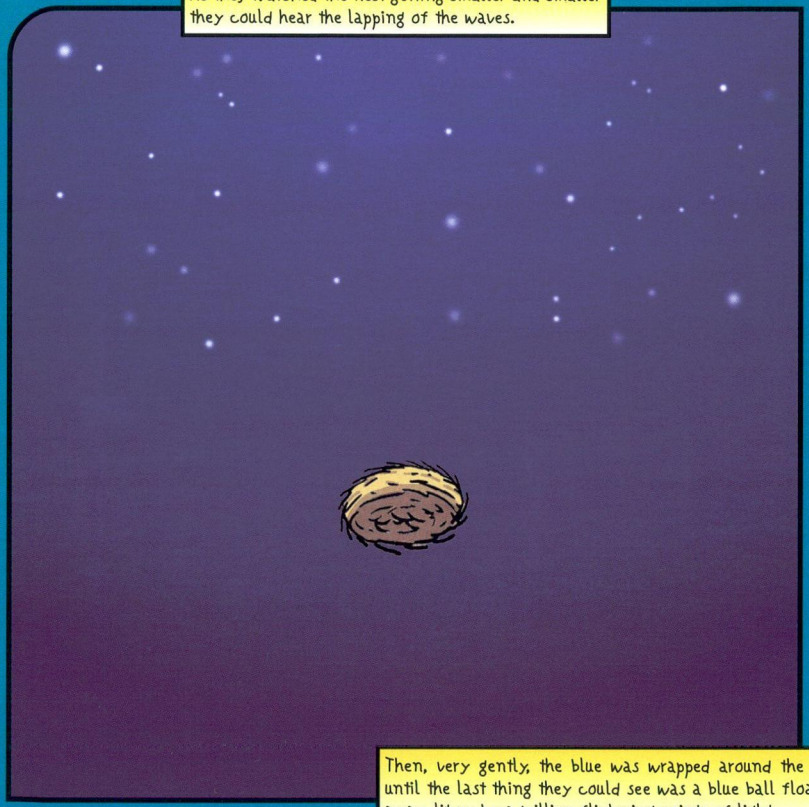
Then they heard a rustle of leaves behind them and another man fell upwards out of the tree, feet first. It was clear to Sofia that this was the turning of turnings. The whole world was being flipped upside down.

She called all the people together to convince them of the danger of looking into the sky. And then she told them of her dream in which she had seen her son, as the link between earth and sky, escaping on a nest that could sail into the heavens. She begged everyone, both earth and skypeople, to work together and build a ship out of branches, to carry OVO safely across the oceansky.

And so it was, on a long day when the oceansky was a deep dark mixture of red and gold, that a beautiful nest of branches softened with leaves and feathers was lifted to the crest of the tree and loaded with food. Then everyone tied themselves to the top branches. They all held on as Sofia gently laid OVO down in the centre of the nest.

All at once they looked up to where the sky had been and started to feel the pull of the great blue sea. When the current was running deep within them, they began to slip upwards. They went as far as their ropes would allow.
Then Sofia gave the instruction and they let go of the nest.

At first nothing happened, then slowly the nest began to float away toward the glistening water above, drifting into the future.
Sofia had never felt so much sadness and yet, as she looked around the faces of all these people she knew so well, she had never seen so much hope.


As they watched the nest getting smaller and smaller they could hear the lapping of the waves.
Then, very gently, the blue was wrapped around the nest until the last thing they could see was a blue ball floating away, lit up by a million flickering points of light.

THE
END